Heart Shaped Face by botanicapoetica

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Genre: Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Billy gets a hug, Hurt/Comfort, M/M, Other, Social Worker!Billy AU, steve is an angel
Language: English
Characters: Billy Hargrove, Neil Hargrove, Original Female Character(s), Steve Harrington
Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington
Status: Completed
Published: 2017-11-28
Updated: 2017-11-28
Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:02:39
Rating: General Audiences
Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Chapters: 1
Words: 960
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

He remembers Billy coming back to their tiny apartment after his first day at work, throwing himself heavily onto the couch with a hand over his face, his other dropping down to let the dog sniff and bump at him. Steve had been worried, maybe all of Steve's pushing Billy through school was wrong, maybe this line of work really was too heavy for him. He remembers the tone of Billy's voice as he sighed through his palm.

"Steve, I think I've been adopted."

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Author's Note:

Inspired by my HC about Future Billy, enjoy

“Has he tried on the sweater yet?”

“It looks so good on him, Erin. You outdid yourself this year. I think he’s too embarrassed to wear it yet though, so I wouldn’t hold your breath.”

“What about the blanket? Are you making sure that boy’s sleeping enough?”

“If I figured out how to get Billy to sleep enough, believe me, I’d be making a public announcement. And...he sleeps with it every night. You didn’t hear that from me.”

Steve sometimes couldn’t tell who he loved more, Billy Hargrove or Erin Clifford. He remembers Billy coming back to their tiny apartment after his first day at work, throwing himself heavily onto the couch with a hand over his face, his other dropping down to let the dog sniff and bump at him. Steve had been worried, maybe all of Steve’s pushing Billy through school was wrong, maybe this line of work really was too heavy for him. He remembers the tone of Billy’s voice as he sighed through his palm.

“Steve, I think I’ve been adopted.”

Erin Clifford was a small, relatively frail woman, but the second she opened her mouth you would’ve thought she was ten feet tall. Steve remembers Billy telling him all about her, acting exasperated but so clearly trying not to smile.

“Steve, she makes me put on an extra sweater inside, like I’m some boxcar kid who’s never been warm. She keeps throwing carrots at me and telling me I’m going to be ugly and wrinkly before I turn 30.”

Steve noticed that every time Billy would come home to complain about his coworker he never followed up with any story about

stopping her. He remembers stowing that information away for the moment he finally got to meet this infamous woman, who sounded large and presumptuous and not entirely warm. He remembers the first time he met her, surprised that he ended up having to look down to introduce himself.

She'd squinted her eyes at him for one long moment and looked over to Billy, who looked...nervous? And oh my god, Billy was nervous. That Erin wouldn't like HIM. But then her eyes had drifted back to Steve, she'd held on to his hand with both of hers, and said, "Don't let this boy go, even if he tries to make you. Don't you ever let him leave."

Taking in the sight of Billy rubbing the back of his neck, his ears pink, was all it took for Steve to declare Erin Clifford his new one true love.

Steve was taken out of his reminiscing by Erin bumping his shoulder, her head nodding in the direction of the potluck tables. They both watched as Billy charmed his way down the line, enthusiastically complimenting the older women who had cooked dishes for tonight, pointing over at Steve with a big smile on his face as he probably botched the recipe explanation for the sangria they'd brought.

"How's he been doing, since?"

That question halted Steve for a second, taking him back to the beginning of the week. Steve remembers getting a phone call from Erin while he was at work during his lunch break because yes, maybe Steve was no longer cool and sometimes called a 60 year old woman to talk to her during his free time. Erin had sounded fine, but maybe like she'd been cradling the phone in her shoulder the whole time, and had asked him if he could come down for a little bit. Steve had arrived at the CPS office and was heading to the front door when he heard Erin's scratchy voice to the right, and his heart had stuttered.

Erin was sitting on the curb and Billy had been sitting next to her, leaning heavily against her shoulder, his head hanging between his knees and his hands pressed to his face. Steve watched Erin as she rubbed at Billy's back, a look on her face like this was not the first time in her life she'd done this in her line of work. He sat down on

the other side of Billy and listened to Erin explain that Billy had gotten into a screaming match with one of his case parents, and Billy lifted his head up, sniffling.

“He just, Steve, he sounded just like fucking Neil. He was talking about his kid, his kid was sitting RIGHT THERE. He was asking me why he was even there, he met his friends at the local Eagles Bar every Wednesday so he couldn’t make it to his check ins. Steve, this guy, he was saying his kid would probably die of his own doing by the time he was 18 anyway so...fuck. I’m really sorry. This is stupid, I’m sorry-”

Steve remembers then, Erin and him coming to put their arms around Billy. Billy had started crying in earnest then, and Steve had felt so at home at that moment. Someone else was there to look out for Billy when he couldn’t. That thought was cemented by the small “Thanks, mom.” he’d directed at Erin, the embarrassed ducking of his head after, and the completely blinding smile Erin had directed at Steve in response.

“He’s doing okay now. Been a rough couple of nights, but he’s coming through. You wouldn’t believe what it was like ten years ago, Erin. Things like that would’ve just destroyed him.”

Steve watched as Erin continued to watch Billy, a small smile on her face. She reached over to pat Steve’s shoulder, her eyes never leaving her target as she said, “You know, I’ve been doing this a long time. I’ve seen broken families, broken homes, and broken systems for thirty years now. It feels pretty good to watch something being fixed.”

Author's Note:

as always, catch me over at botanicapoetica.tumblr.com